
Dr. John Torrey in the Catskills

RAYMOND H. TORREY

An acquaintance established by correspondence, between the writer and Mr. Franklin Benner, of the Franklin Benner Land Company, of Minneapolis, Minn., who wrote to inquire if I were related to Dr. John Torrey (which I am not, or at least only very distantly, by way of Captain William Torrey, our progenitor in America, who settled in Weymouth, Mass., in 1640) has brought to me from Mr. Benner, an autograph letter, written by Dr. Torrey, from Princeton, N. J., July 22, 1844. This letter was to Robert Benner, 33 John Street, New York, regarding a trip which they and others proposed to make to the Catskills, for botanical collecting.

Mr. Benner, whose father Robert Benner married a niece of Dr. Torrey, writes as follows concerning the letter:

"In looking over some old correspondence I came across some old letters to my father, and I thought perhaps you or the Society would like to have an autographed letter from him. The subject matter of these letters was the trip to the Catskill Mountains, for the study of the botany of that region, as Dr. Torrey was then preparing a monograph of the flora of that region published in the geological survey of the state. They spent some time in the Catskills and my father joined them. While on that expedition they found a huge boulder some ten or fifteen feet in diameter on the top of 'Round Top' and they spent nearly a week digging away the ground underneath, and finally, when they had it loose enough, they started it down the mountain with levers and it did not stop until it got to the bottom cutting a swathe through all the forest in its way. Whether this item pertains to the study of Botany, I do not know, but evidently it amused the botanists. On this trip my father met for the first time Dr. Torrey's niece, whom he later married, and who was my mother."

Round Top is presumably the summit now called by that name, about 3500 feet above sea, south of Haines Falls, and

northwest of the slightly higher elevation known as High Peak, which the Torrey Botanical Club visited in October 1930 on a field trip.

Dr. Torrey's letter is as follows:

"Princeton, July 22nd, 1844.

MY DEAR SIR:

I thank you for your letter of the 19th inst. and for the kind offer it contains, of conducting me through the more interesting regions of the Catskill range. If I go, (and I shall endeavor to do so) it must be the first week or two in August, as I have engaged to give some lectures here, to commence about the 10th or 12th of that month. I think that Prof. Bailey of West Point would be glad to go, though I fear he will not be able to clamber about the hills as well as we. I have long promised one of my daughters (a young girl of 15) a trip to the Catskills. Do you think she would be able to reach the Round Top? We might be able to engage a stout man to carry luggage, provisions, etc. Prof. Bailey talked of camping out, and he could bring with him a very good tent. What say you to this? I will write to him immediately and if you and he can go about the beginning of August, we might as well make our arrangements at once. If it would be impracticable to take my daughter, please let me know soon.

Yours very cordially,

John Torrey

Robert Benner, Esq.